



The Prairies

The world of independent production seems to be on tenderhooks as filmmaking communities in both Alberta and Saskatchewan wait for governments to confirm tax credits as part of their 1998 budgets. In Alberta, the 1998 hope is thin, although recent government announcements are showing a change in its stalwart "slash" mentality. Alberta's Minister of Science, Research and Technology, Lorne Taylor, is working on a plan that will produce a tax credit for all knowledge-based industries, including film and television... In Saskatchewan, the outlook is more positive after the industry's two-year effort in crafting a plan that will give a 35-per cent labour credit to productions shot in the province, making it competitive with Manitoba, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. SaskFilm general manager Mark Prasuhn says he's waiting for final approval in early March. That news will come just in time for writer/director Gil Cardinal and his epic four-hour CBC-TV miniseries *Big Bear*, set to shoot for 15 weeks through this spring and summer. Based on the novel by Rudy Wiebe about one of Western Canada's greatest Indian chiefs, Cardinal and his producing partners Doug Cuthand and Dorothy Schreiber will team up with Téléaction Montreal for the \$8-million blockbuster. "This is the largest-budget project ever seen in Saskatchewan," says Prasuhn. "It's a breakthrough on every level, in terms of aboriginal participation (Gordon Tootoosis is to star) and having a project of this historical and cultural importance shot here. It is a big step forward." ... Back in Alberta, the series *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* is wrapping its first season of production. The show has been renewed for another round, but no guarantees as to whether or not Calgary will be the location. In Canmore, Burt Reynolds, basking in his Oscar nomination for *Boogie Nights*, plays a coach in *Mystery Alaska*, a Disney feature about an Alaskan hockey team that takes on the New York Rangers. But the United States isn't responsible for all the action, says Alberta Film Commission assistant director Brenda Maclean, who reports that *Due South* brought its business to Alberta for a mountain-adventure episode. Brad Fraser will also make his mark on Calgary's production roster in the year ahead with *Poor Super Man*, a National Screen Institute Features First project. Maclean acknowledged the importance of the tax credit to the future of independent production in Alberta, but noted that the CFCN production fund and the A-Channel's production fund were also supporting the industry at a dangerous time. In the meantime, she and Alberta Film Commission head, Murray Ord, continue their forays south of the border seeking to keep the local crews busy until Alberta producers can hire them again.

Fran Humphreys

West Coast

Local writer/director Raul Sanchez Inglis—who honed his writing chops by working on genre pieces for the Vince brothers, among others—is in the editing room putting together his debut feature. While *The Falling* is a low-budget effort, it nevertheless managed to attract some of Vancouver's most talented young artists and technicians, DOP Greg Middleton among them. Vicki Southeran, Evan Tylor and Greg Malcolm are the producers. Reports from the set have guns figuring prominently in the genre pic's scenario... A typically wet February 3rd saw the commencement of shooting for the north-of-\$40-million Universal film, *Snow Falling on Cedars*, the first to be directed by Aussie Scott Hicks since his celebrated *Shine* brought him fame and a chance to work in Hollywood. Scheduled to wrap in May, the film stars Ethan Hawke (*Great Expectations*) and Youki Kudoh, currently on screen in the Russell Crowe-vehicle, *Heaven's Burning*, but is more famously known for her affecting turn in Jim Jarmusch's *Mystery Train*. Ex-Amblin execs Kathleen Kennedy and Frank Marshall are the executive producers while Richard Vane serves as producer... The January/February issue of *Reel West*, the local industry bible, reported that British Columbia was home to more than 100 productions—TV series, movies and features—in 1997, a number that should continue to increase now that the provincial government has introduced a tax credit scheme... Finally, what would this column be without at least one reference to *The X-Files* (and don't say "better")? Everyone has been talking about the inevitability of a move to Los Angeles to appease David Duchovny. Well, rumour on the set has it that the show's creator Chris Carter has just signed with Fox for two more years as executive producer. Carter is known to be a big fan of Vancouver and its varied locations (not to mention the devalued Canadian dollar) and my source has suggested that his signing on for two more years means the show is staying in Vancouver. Which, if proven true, will be a big relief to all the locals who make their livelihood from the series. And if my source is wrong, it just goes to show that you really should "trust no one."

Jack Verme

The X-Files to stay in Vancouver?

